



The Genocide Education Project

October 7, 2015

History-Social Science Subject Matter Committee
Instructional Quality Commission
1430 N Street, Suite #5111
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: History-Social Science Framework

Dear Committee Members,

As you refine the draft revision of the History-Social Science Curriculum Framework, we write to bring to your attention a number of critical factual and contextual errors in the current draft for Grades 9-12, as it pertains to the Armenian Genocide. We urge you to correct these serious errors, which contradict the most current scholarship consensus on the subject. Important context must also be included about the significance of this major event in modern world history and its relevance for guiding educators as they strive to develop students with strong critical thinking skills who, understanding the legacies of such events, can become more effective and engaged global citizens and civic leaders.

Genocide education and an examination of the prototype case of the Armenian Genocide, which was formally integrated into the public school curriculum with the passage of Assembly Bill 1273 in 1985, has become more important than ever. As our students today continue to witness acts of genocide and genocide denial, this prototype of modern genocides has become the essential teaching tool for the examination of patterns and stages of genocide in modern times and how the level and quality of international responses and accountability have profound consequences across time and geography.

These are the incorrect parts of the framework draft we've found which require amendment:

1. Line 619-620: The phrase, "the Turkish government, *or elements within it*" indicates that it's not clear whether it was the government, or "rogue" individuals or groups within it, who carried out the genocide. What does that mean? That the Ottoman/Turkish government did not actually order the mass deportations and murder of the Armenian population? Scholarship on the Armenian Genocide has left no doubt that the crimes were clearly a government program and we feel the words "*or elements within it*" should also be deleted.

2. Line 620-621: Saying simply that the government ordered a “mass deportation” gives the false impression that the government’s intent was not to annihilate the Armenian people, but merely to move them, and to reduce the description of that genocide to the overly simplistic and one-dimensional term, “mass deportation,” results in a grossly misleading characterization of this event. The purpose of all of the brutal actions taken against the Armenians – arrest and mass murder of hundreds of Armenian leaders at the genocide’s outset; then rape, torture, maiming, starvation, holocausts in desert caves during mass deportations, as well as widespread kidnapping and forced Turkification and Islamization of women and children, and seizure of all personal and community properties, etc. – these were the acts that made up the Armenian Genocide. “Mass deportation” was simply one of the means employed to achieve the objective of genocide. In addition, the motivation for this crime must be understood as part of a plan of “pan-Turkism” to eradicate all non-Muslim minorities from Turkey, as evidenced by the murder of not only the Armenians, but of hundreds of thousands of Greeks and Assyrians as well.
3. Lines 622-623: Similar to the second item above, the sentence, “Ottoman authorities force marched Armenians to the Syrian and Mesopotamian deserts, an act of genocide that cost perhaps one million lives” also gives the false impression that mass deportations were the only mechanism that constituted the Armenian Genocide. As noted earlier, the Armenian Genocide was many-faceted, with all methods, including the death marches geared towards the goal of erasing Armenian civilization and culture. Also, the phrase “...cost perhaps one million lives” is dangerously erroneous. The use of “perhaps” suggests that the number killed could be at most one million, although in fact, most scholars agree that approximately 1.5 million, two-thirds or more of the Armenian people living in their historic homeland were killed. It is important for students to learn this fact accurately and in context, in order to grasp the enormity of the devastation. The current draft of this section is also inconsistent with California Government Code Section 6720, which designates April 24th of each year as the California Day of Remembrance of the Armenian Genocide, “*...in memory of the 1,500,000 victims who were subjected to torture, starvation, and murder, including death marches into the Syrian desert, by the rulers of the Ottoman Turkish Empire and the exile of more than 500,000 innocent people during the period from 1915 to 1923, inclusive, and in honor of the survivors of those crimes against humanity.*”

We propose replacing lines 619-633 of the current framework for 9-12 grades with the following text, which correct the errors in the current draft revision and more fully serves the broad goals of the framework:

In 1915, as the Ottoman Empire declined, the Turkish government carried out a

systematic genocide against the Armenian population that had been living on its historic homeland in what is now eastern Turkey. Turkish authorities first arrested hundreds of Armenian political and intellectual leaders, sending them to their deaths; Armenian men were conscripted into work camps where they were killed outright or through exhaustion; The remaining Armenians were ordered onto death marches into the Syrian desert, during which they were subjected to rape, torture, mutilation, starvation, holocausts in desert caves, kidnapping and forced Turkification and Islamization.

Approximately 1.5 million Armenians, more than half of the population, were eliminated in this way, virtually all their personal and community properties were seized by the government, and more than 500,000 innocent people were forced into exile during the period from 1915 to 1923.

Within the context of human rights and genocide, students should learn of the Ottoman government's planned systematic annihilation of the Armenian population in 1915. The Armenian Genocide that opened the twentieth century would be followed by the Holocaust and others in Cambodia, Rwanda, and Darfur at the opening of the twenty-first century. Students should also examine the reactions of other governments, including that of the United States, and world opinion during and after the Armenian genocide. Teachers can introduce the history of the Near East Relief organization established by the former U.S. ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau. Near East Relief came to the aid of hundreds of thousands of Armenian Genocide survivors through the establishment of orphanages, food and vocational programs, etc. Teachers can also use the example of the first international aid project of the Red Cross, that of helping Armenian Genocide survivors, and the prevalent use of the phrase, "Remember the starving Armenians!" as a means to demonstrate to students the profound effect the Armenian Genocide had on the American public. They should examine the effects of the genocide on the remaining Armenian people, who were deprived of their historic homeland, and the ways in which it became a prototype of subsequent genocides. What were the consequences of World War I for nations, ethnic groups, and people?

We urge you to adopt this language, and we thank you for your consideration and your work in aligning the state's History-Social Science Framework with current instructional practices and academic awareness.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Roxanne M." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Roxanne Makasdjian
Founder, Member of the Board of Directors
The Genocide Education Project